O POOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE!

This Poet Quivers In American Slang

IN AMERICAN—POEMS. By John V. A. WEAVER. Alfred A. Knopf.

Slang is one thing, sentiment is another, and poetry is still a third. It is an easy matter to drop your "g's" and to say "bust" for "burst." But when you can put real dialect in the mouths of real everyday people, when you can place these people in original situations and make them act naturally and stirringly, as John V. A. Weaver does, it matters little whether you write in "American" or in English.

The essence of the poems in this collection is their realism. There is pathos, but no cheap slush. Mr. Weaver writes of the druggist who is tired of selling soda and telling people the time; of the girl whose beau gave her a phonograph before geoing to war and left that as the only memory of him; of the piker who would have won if he hadn't funked at betting on the horse; of the man who was obsessed by screeching cats. In sum he shows that strong emotions are not for thinkers of great thoughts alone.

Mr. Weaver displays strong narrative power and inventiveness. He shows, too, some insight into a young woman's mind. Consider such pieces as "Au Revoir," about the girl who is saturated with kisses and can't stand another; "Prayer," which begs God to assure the girl of her fellow's love; "In Love," which gives a rebuke to the girl who loses her heart quickly and frequently; "Denouement," which portrays the state of mind of a girl who has been left for another. Here is such a convincing, perfect cross-analysis of emotional life that wonder cannot but accompany the thought that a man wrote it. This is how "Denouement" begins:

So now I get the dirty throw-down, huh?
What do I mean? Yeh, that's a good one, ain't it?
How do you get that way? You think I'm blind?
I seen you with that girl the other night.

Aw, Frank, how could ya ever come to do it?
I ain't changed, am I? Ain't I just as swell?
Don't my eyes shine the same way, just for you?
Don't you remember out to San Soozy
We won long distance prizes dancin' together?
You says, "You keep the prize; what's mine is yourn,
And vicey-versy."

She goes on to chide herself for having been gullible, for believing everything he told her. And then she recalls a night on the steamboat, the winking stars, the "niggers singin' soft, playin' their yukalalies." And she remembers his pointing out the double row of lights along the shore—how he called them the city's teeth, shining with happy laughter. Yes, and she remembers—and now!

I'm finished—thrun away! . . . Them lights *was* teeth—
The teeth the city's got, to tear and tear me—
Murderin', tearin' teeth! They got me in 'em! . . .
Go on away! I never want to see you!
Go get that redhead fool; tell her I sent you!
I hope she'll be another fool like me.
I hope you burn and burn in hell!
I hope—
Oh, what's there anything to hope for now?

There is no doubt about it; Weaver has power. Only it is wrong to say that this medium of his is the real American language; it isn't that any more than cockney is the real English language.

American as She Is Sometimes Spoken

AMERICAN ENGLISH. By Gilbert M. Tucker. Alfred A. Knopf.

Reviewed by WILLIS STEELL.

Every decade or so a discussion appears in a big book under either English or American imprint of the way we speak here and the way they (the British) speak over there. Faults of either peoples are generally charged by the authors of each country to the other one, but in fairness it must be admitted that they are to be found in both. However much an American may admire the softer intonation and better diction of the average educated Englishman he wouldn't care to adopt his whole vocabulary.

Ten bulky octavo volumes have been devoted to this subject to go no farther back than Pickering's "Vocabulary," which contains, it is said, 50 real Americanisms in a list of 500 reputed to be such. Then follow Bartlett's "Dictionary of Americanisms," 800 pages; de Vere's "Americanisms," 800 pages, and a tall octavo of 380 pages by H. L. Mencken. The last, a recent book, does not depend for its very real interest on a comparison of words, but sharply goes deeper and appeals to a wider audience than the thorough going etymologists. It is an attractive work distinguished by the merits and faults of this clever man.

To the list is to be added Mr. Tucker's book, another big octavo of 375 pages. Without prejudice this addition may be called a vacant book; its argument might better be contained in an epigram and its long list of exotic Americanisms and a shorter one of real Americanisms are to be found in any good dictionary with a brief history of the forbears. We have no doubt the author is right when he says that better English, on the whole, is spoken in the United States than in Great Britain, and we are able to add to his instances of faulty grammar perpetuated by British writers, some that we have ourselves noticed even in Thackeray and Stevenson. But what is gained by this kind of discussion? A little sop to our self-love, perhaps. The English language is so sound fundamentally that it bears transportation about the world very well indeed, yet it would be strange if in its voyagings it did not pick up queer, un-English words now and then. Which shows its vitality.

Colorado Cowboys Talk in Rhyme

CACTUS CENTER: Poems of an Arizona Town. By Arthur Chapman. Houghton Mifflin Company.

Reviewed by CORNELIA P. LATHROP.

There is much in common between the poet, who has once written a bit of verse which has swung off on a winged popularity of quotation from coast to coast, and the quiet commonplace citizen who foresightedly ordered the hugest mausoleum in the town cemetery and now lies beneath it. The Sunday strollers in the cemetery may comment regretfully upon the life and good works of their former fellow-townsman; but the newcomers will associate him only with the marble opulence of his one visible memorial.

"Cactus Center" is introduced as the latest production of the author of "Out Where the West Begins"—that Colorado classic which Denver newspaper readers clipped from Mr. Chapman's column some years ago and sent around the world. According to the reminiscent publishers, "It is perhaps the best known bit of verse in America. It hangs framed in the office of the Secretary of the Interior at Washington [or did before March 4]. It has been quoted in Congress and printed as campaign material for at least two Governors. It has crossed both the Atlantic and the Pacific, while throughout the country it may be found pinned on walls and pasted in scrapbooks innumerable."

As we recall this modest early tribute of Mr. Chapman's to the ethnology, economics and meteorology of Colorado and parts adjacent, it was quite the fitting thing to be included in political speeches and in any conscientious scrapbook. Indeed, we should not be surprised to learn that it had appealed strangely to the advertising manager of the Denver and Rio Grande, and that anti-Colorado riots had thereby been incited in the streets of Los Angeles.

Otherwise "Out Where the West Begins" is set aside utterly by the poems of "Cactus Center," and if Mr. Chapman's publishers would permit us to overlook his earlier burst of local pride and not linger further in reminiscence we would pick up his new book far more eagerly.

Right here the Eastern reader should be warned. There is much gunplay in Cactus Center; and a degree of comfortable exaggeration—both of which to the liberal-minded may at once seem quaint and unreal. Too frequently tourists are made of such literal-minded clay. Any one who has enjoyed the untrammelled tale of the adventurer who "bet he could make the Grand Canyon in two jumps, but gave it up and had to come back when he was only half-way across," is qualified to enjoy the whimsicalities of Mr. Chapman; but those who have listened to the legend impatiently (and they are many) had best close the book. To such the practical protest of Mr. Bear Hawkins against the instructions of classic dancing to whom he had rented his pasture will appear somewhat crass:

The cowboys sat for hours on the top rail of the fence
And watched the classic dancers as they flitted here and whence,
Till Bear Hawkins said: "Dear madam, you must sure detour your freight;
While we like your classic dancin', we must hand it to you straight
That you've got our punchers locoed, and the case is just this size:
You must quit this cattle country or the price of beef will rise!"

The only fault to be found by any one else, however, is this: that every so often it would appear that Mr. Chapman is reminded that he is the author of "Out Where the West Begins" and that therefore the West begins to expect from him something quite different—a short sob concerning "The Last Drift" or "The Legend of the Sagebrush" or "The Hermit." Unfortunately these sentimental sidetrackings are included with the annals of Cactus Center. Although they interrupt an otherwise pleasant evening, it is altogether possible that they have been deliberately chosen by the author as acutely Western. The balladry of the range varies, as every reader of Lomax knows, from mellow extravaganza to starkly maudlin sentiment. Therefore it may well be that the Chapman Pegasus insists upon pasturing far from Cactus Center every little while, as did his bronco ancestors.

Despite the frequent flourish of sidearms in Cactus Center certain of the aborigines thrive delightfully. There is Six-Gun Steve, for example, who shot up the Center now and again, laying out one by one each newly appointed marshal, until, failing candidates for the office, Steve himself was acclaimed marshal. And again we are introduced to the novelist who comes to town in quest of local color and is set to work on the Bar X ranch by Waco Roberts, the foreman at "fixin' irrigatin' ditches, and a-feedin' stock with hay." His disappointment is tragic:

He hustled wood for fires till his arms was 'most broke off,
And he hollered at the milch cows till he nearly got a cough;
And when he says "Beg pardon, but trot out your Western biz,"
Ole Waco says "Keep workin' "—this is all the West there is.

Stories Out of the Children's Court

QUICKSANDS OF YOUTH. By Franklin Chase Hoyt. Charles Scribner's Sons.

A sixteen-year-old boy was taken into custody recently at Port Chester, N. Y., because he was found sleeping behind some trolley barns and sentenced to a "trouncing" at home. The Magistrate said if it wasn't given there he would do it himself. Judge Hoyt deals with such cases every day in the children's court of New York, and after reading his book we can imagine how he would have dealt with this case.

We are quite sure that a "trouncing" would not have been his sentence. We can imagine him up there on his ruling chair, his mind and heart full of sympathy and consideration as he gazed upon the youngster before him.

Franklin Chase Hoyt.

He would first get the full particulars in order to work with a complete understanding of the case. He would then ask the boy if he liked to sleep outdoors. Was the room he slept in uncomfortable and close? The youth's answer would, no doubt, be "Yes." Judge Hoyt would then say: "Michael, I am going to give you another chance. Take this letter to Mr. So-and-So, who is a Scoutmaster near your home, and join his troop. You will learn there lessons of obedience to your parents and cleanliness, and you will have, no doubt, many opportunities of sleeping outdoors. I want you to come to see me once a month and tell me how you are getting along." And the lad would look him straight in the eye and say, "Thank you, Judge." So much for little Michael of Port Chester, N. Y.

Judge Hoyt's book is made up of stories that clearly relate for us youth's encounter with the law, and it makes no pretensions to being a manual on juvenile court work. The stories are selections in narrative form of a number of incidents from the records of the children's court, and comments are brought in only where Judge Hoyt found it "necessary to bind these sketches together into one consecutive whole." His criticisms refer mostly to parents and guardians, many of them as much below par as the children. We find in his book stories of crime in embryo, of cruelty and neglect and of yearning for play and pleasure, an instinct of the growing child which for his proper development ought to be gratified.

In his chapter "Sometimes We Smile" the author demonstrates that a Judge *does* laugh once in a while, even if it takes a wee small person to make him. "Those who imagine," he says, "that the court is steeped in nothing but misery and tears would be somewhat surprised if they should visit it and observe its operations at first hand. They would find it enveloped in an atmosphere of optimism and cheerfulness and redolent of happiness and successful achievement."

Tommy had been hauled into court for truancy, and after being placed on probation, "he foresaw that while the spirit was willing the flesh might prove to be weak." He laid his plans to protect himself against failure. Judge Hoyt continues the narrative:

"For a time all went well, but after a month or two his efforts began to lag, and we received a complaint from his school that Tommy's studiousness, effort and conduct were becoming steadily worse. This led our probation officer to pay a visit to his mother and to talk to her about Tommy's shortcomings.

"'Why do you suppose he is getting such bad marks in everything?' the probation officer sadly inquired of her.

"'Bad marks, is it?' the proud mother exclaimed indignantly. 'Sure, he is getting the best marks possible!'

"'I'm sorry to tell you that you're mistaken,' the officer replied. 'He gets nothing but C's and D's.'

"'Why, how could he do better?' she retorted triumphantly. 'When Tommy was put on probation he told me all about those marks. He said that A would stand for *awful*, B for *bad*, C for *corking* and D for *dandy*, and he's been getting nothing but C's and D's for everything.'"

One might go on quoting forever the incidents which Judge Hoyt has selected for his book. His stories, told in a fascinating style, will certainly appeal to the general public, for whom they are written, furnishing amusement as well as information. They throw a clear white light on what the Juvenile Court is doing in making true citizens and decent Americans of the boys and girls who come before it.

The Book Factory

By EDWARD ANTHONY.

Tomeville Anthology.

TRUE MEMOIRS.

"These memoirs," the notice declares,
"Are truthful as memoirs can be;
The author (V. Racity) swears
The book from deception is free.
No coloring here, not a jot;
No gullery, clever and bold;
No tricks that the charlatans plot—
Aye, only the truth has been told"

Oh, I am a stickler for truth.
I frequently tell it, I do;
It's an excellent habit, forsooth,
And I venture YOU practise it, too
(On occasion). But oh, in a book
Beguilement is all I desire,
And I wear a much happier look
When the author's a rattling good liar!

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ONE OF THOSE CONVERSATIONS.

Two friends—Jim and Bill—meet. Each has just read a book that the other is unfamiliar with. Neither wishes to admit that he doesn't know the other man's book. Their conversation sounds something like this:

"'Lo, Bill. Just read a fine book—'Romping Around.' Great stuff."

"You bet."

"Then you've read it?"

"Oh, yeah. Good character work, Jim."

"Whatddye mean—character work? It's a book of travel, Bill."

"You misunderstand me, Jim. I mean it's got lots of character."

"Oh!"

"Yop—that's what I mean. Lots of character. . . . By the way, have *you* read the book that *I* have just finished—'A Beast of Burden'?"

"'A Beast of Burden'? Lemme think. . . . Oh, yeah, I remember that book. Sure I've read it. And it's a fine horse story too."

"Horse story? Aren't you mistaken, Jim? It isn't a horse story. It's about a poor boob who went through life with a thousand burdens."

"Of course it is, Bill! You misunderstand me. I simply meant he was a horse for punishment."

"Oh!"

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DISAGREEING WITH MR. LEWIS.

We can't agree with Sinclair Lewis's indictment of the small town. It was in a barber shop on Main Street, Sheridan, Wyo., that we had the only haircut we have ever had with an electric clipper. The shop had six chairs, equipped with these devices and the speed with which the barbers lopped off the tresses of hairy cowpunchers made us blush for the inefficiency of the big town barber shop with its hand-propelled clippers. The more we think of this the weaker Mr. Lewis's case seems.

Still, if Cowpuncher Fred Hilman of the D-H Ranch in Big Horn is to be believed, these electric haircutters aren't a regular Sheridan luxury. Fred once told us that they were only available for barber shop use when the Anderson Sheep Ranch wasn't shearing.

By the way, if we ever open a barber shop we're going to call it Locksley Hall.

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RANDOM THOUGHTLET.

Some patrons of circulating libraries take out Harold Bell Wright, while others hire a Hall Caine.

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NOW'S THE TIME TO SUBSCRIBE.

Brentano's have enlarged and improved their little magazine, *Book Chat*, and are sending it regularly to any one who wants it—for nothing a year.

John Witsil, who proves by his westkits and spats that he knows something about decorative art, doesn't overpraise the cover design, but otherwise he admits it's a whale of a book-lovers' publication. Present plans call for six issues a year. The current number contains articles by Gertrude Atherton, Floyd Dell, Sherwood Anderson, Zona Gale and other well known writers.

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LUNGTHROBS.

The specific systemic qualities of love arise from the region of the lungs."—Prof. Howard C. Warren in "Human Psychology," published by Houghton Mifflin.

"Take a deep breath and say you love me,
And vow that none you rate above me."
"Oh, if 'twill help your doubts to shatter,
Just hear my lungs go pitter patter!"
"Promise—I ask no sweeter tonic—
A love eternal and pulmonic."
"Doubt not my love, nor sit and mope, dear;
Measure it with a stethoscope, dear!"

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IN WHICH WE MAKE A BRIGHT REMARK.

"I don't like Hardy," says our friend Carrie Cheer. He's too gray."

"And why shouldn't he be?" retorts your correspondent. He's over 80, isn't he?"

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Announcement of the publication by Macmillan of "The Sexual Life of the Child," by Dr. Albert Moll, reminds us of the merry poem in Morrie Ryskind's "Unaccustomed as I Am" (Knopf), in which the child actor in the movie studio remarks:

"Sex doesn't bother me at all;
They say it doesn't when you're small."

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COLORFUL LITERATURE.

We have before us an announcement of a new book, which, take it from the publishers, is "very dainty in its taupe-colored paper boards and tawny paper label." Too bad the covers aren't mauve. We couldn't think of buying a book that didn't match the wallpaper in our bedroom.